

FILE ONLY

Daughter digs up clues

Father's disappearance is still mystery

By JEFF BARON
Journal staff writer

Carol Solstad hasn't found her father, but six weeks after going public in her search for him she is convinced she is closer than ever.

Solstad, who believes her father has spent a career in the intelligence community, is seeking help to prove it and to find him.

"I've never felt closer than this time," said Solstad, 42, of Lawton, Okla.

Her father, Army Lt. Rae Curtis Hickingbotham Jr., disappeared without a trace in October 1947 while assigned to work at Arlington Hall Station, the Army's intelligence headquarters. If he were alive today, Hickingbotham would be 69.

Hickingbotham was a decorated World War II veteran and a cryptographer with the Army Signal Corps.

Solstad said members of her family have never been able to find any reason for his disappearance beyond the pressure of work so secret he wouldn't even describe it to his wife. A 1947 Army investigation Solstad described as cursory turned up nothing.

So when she ran advertisements in *The Journal* in March seeking information about her father, Solstad didn't know what to expect. Since then she said she has gotten phone calls from people who claimed to have worked in federal intelligence agencies and to have known her fa-

ther as a co-worker under an assumed name.

"Every other day I get a phone call from somebody weird who says he's got some information on my father and is trying to contact him," Solstad said.

Some calls have been convincing, particularly from a man claiming to be an active U.S. intelligence officer who knew Solstad's father as an officer at the Central Intelligence Agency.

The caller did not leave his name, but knew facts about Hickingbotham — his accent, his limp and the languages he spoke — that had not been publicized, Solstad said.

"This man came on the phone and said my father spoke Mandarin and Farsi," Solstad said.

The man said Hickingbotham is remarried, retired and living in another country. The mysterious caller said he would try to contact Hickingbotham and call back in a few weeks, Solstad said.

Solstad, who worked for 16 years as a newspaper reporter, has done some digging herself to find out whether there is some truth to the stories she has heard.

She said she has spoken to former CIA Director William Colby and his deputy director for covert operations, William Nelson. Both were "very supportive and helpful," but both said they didn't know Hicking-

botham, at least under that name, Solstad said.

She said she also has spoken to experts on the intelligence community, telling them the story of her father's disappearance and asking about the possibility that the CIA quietly took him in and gave him a new life.

"No one said, 'That's crazy, he probably ran off with a blonde,'" Solstad said.

Author and former FBI agent Robert J. Lamphere, for example, said the disappearance of any officer who worked at Arlington Hall Station in the late 1940s would have sparked a thorough investigation. Lamphere said he never knew Hickingbotham, but he worked at Arlington Hall Station in the late '40s.

Army spokesmen said an extensive search of records at the Army Investigative Records Registry at Fort Meade, Md., turned up no file on Hickingbotham, even though he should have been declared a deserter 30 days after he disappeared.

"No file currently exists; that's all I can tell you," said Lt. Col. Richard Holk, a spokesman for the Army Intelligence and Security Command. The command, still based at Arlington Hall Station, is the current version of the intelligence branch where Hickingbotham worked 40 years ago.

Solstad said she would like to find her father so she and her three children can get to know him.